

### Women and HIV/AIDS in the United States

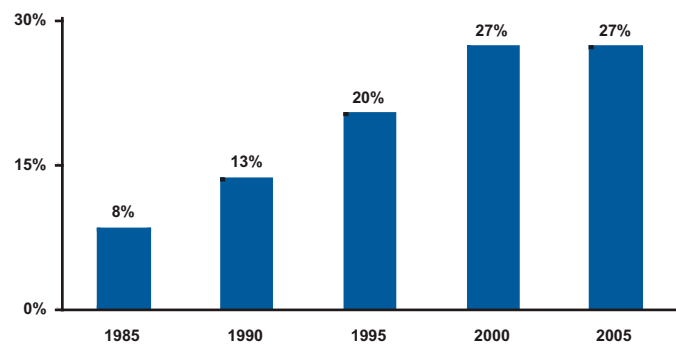
July 2007

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is taking an increasing toll on women and girls in the United States.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Women of color, particularly Black women, have been especially hard hit and represent the majority of new HIV and AIDS cases among women, and the majority of women living with the disease.<sup>1</sup> Many women with HIV/AIDS are low-income and most have important family responsibilities, potentially complicating the management of their illness. Research suggests that women with HIV face limited access to care and experience disparities in access, relative to men.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup> Women are also more biologically susceptible to HIV infection during sex, and experience different clinical symptoms and complications.<sup>3,8</sup> Given these trends and issues, efforts to stem the tide of the U.S. HIV/AIDS epidemic will increasingly depend on how and to what extent its effect on women and girls is addressed.

#### Snapshot of the Epidemic

- Although men continue to represent the majority of new HIV and AIDS cases in the U.S., women account for a growing share. In 1985, women represented 8% of AIDS diagnoses; by 2005 they accounted for 27% (Figure 1).<sup>1,2</sup>
- Today, there are approximately 1.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S., including more than 300,000 women.<sup>9,10</sup>
- In 2005, there were 10,774 AIDS cases diagnosed among women.<sup>1</sup>
- There were 4,128 deaths among women with AIDS in 2005.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1: Women as a Proportion of New AIDS Diagnoses, 1985-2005**<sup>1,2,28</sup>



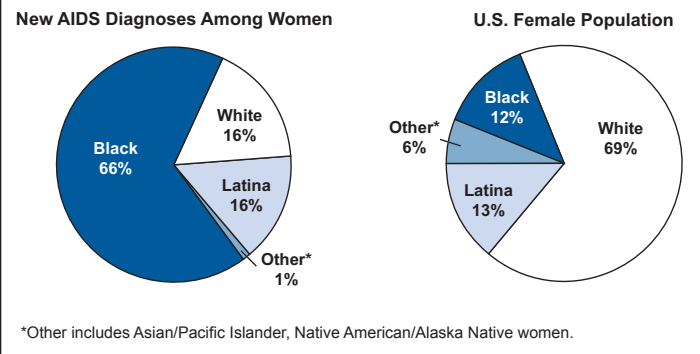
#### Key Trends and Current Cases

**Race/Ethnicity:** Women of color, particularly Black women, are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS (Figure 2).

- Black women account for 66% of estimated AIDS cases among women, aged 13 and older, diagnosed in 2005, but only 12% of the U.S. population of women. Latinas accounted for 16% of estimated AIDS cases, compared to 13% of the female population aged 13 and over.<sup>1,11,12,13</sup>
- The AIDS case rate per 100,000 illustrates the severe impact on women of color. In 2005, the case rate for Black women was 45.5 per 100,000, or 23 times the rate for white women (2.0). The case rate for Latinas of 11.2 was about 6 times the rate for white women. The case rate was 4.4 for American Indian/Alaska Native women and 1.6 for Asian/Pacific Islander women.<sup>1</sup>

- Among women, the number of HIV-related deaths and HIV death rates are highest for Black women. In 2004, HIV was the 3rd leading cause of death among Black women aged 25 to 44, compared to 5th for women overall in the U.S.<sup>14</sup> In 2004, the HIV death rate per 100,000 women, aged 25–44, was 23.1 for Black women, higher than the HIV death rate for white or Latino men in this age group, and second only to the rate among Black men.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2: Estimated AIDS Diagnoses and U.S. Female Population, by Race/Ethnicity, 2005**<sup>1,11,12,13,28</sup>



**Age:** Most women with AIDS were diagnosed between the ages of 25 and 44 (71%), indicating that many were likely infected at a relatively young age.<sup>16</sup> The impact on teen girls is particularly notable. In 2005, teen girls represented 43% of AIDS cases reported among those aged 13–19 and young women, aged 20–24, represented 28% of cases in their age group; comparatively, women aged 25 and older represented 26% of cases in their age group.<sup>17</sup> This more pronounced impact of HIV/AIDS among teen girls may be a harbinger for the epidemic's trajectory.

#### Transmission:

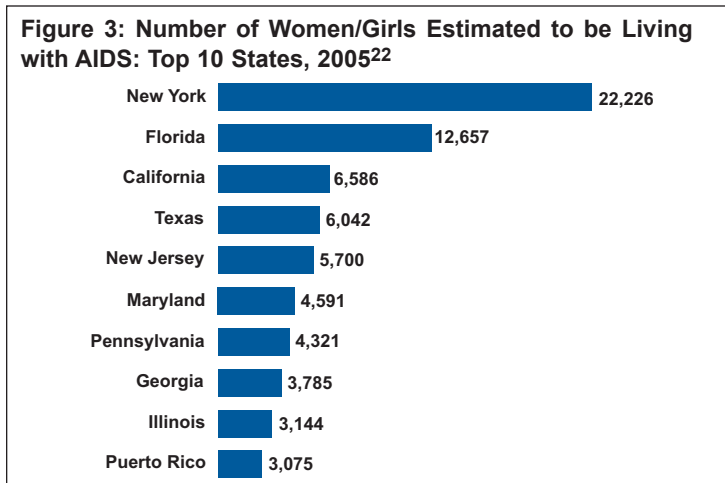
- Most AIDS diagnoses among women are due to heterosexual transmission (70% in 2005) followed by injection drug use (27%).<sup>1</sup> These patterns are fairly consistent across most racial and ethnic groups, although the proportion due to heterosexual transmission is highest among Asian/Pacific Islander women.<sup>18</sup> Among younger women, aged 20–24, heterosexual transmission accounted for 80% of AIDS cases in 2005 and among teen girls, it accounted for 63%.<sup>19</sup>
- Mother-to-child transmission of HIV in the U.S. has decreased dramatically since its peak in 1992 due to the use of antiretroviral therapy (ART), which significantly reduces the risk of transmission from a woman to her baby (to less than 2%). Still, perinatal infections continue to occur each year, the majority of which are among Black Americans.<sup>1,20</sup>
- A recent CDC study found that most pregnant women with HIV (81%) and most babies born to HIV-infected women (93%) have received ART.<sup>21</sup>

**Reproductive health:** HIV interacts with women's reproductive health on many levels:

- The virus is transmitted more efficiently from men to women during sexual intercourse. Having another sexually transmitted disease (STD) may increase risk for contracting HIV.<sup>8</sup>

- Women with HIV are at increased risk for developing or contracting a range of conditions, including cervical dysplasia and human papillomavirus (HPV), precursors for cervical cancer.<sup>8</sup>
- There are a number of new HIV prevention technologies in the late stages of clinical research which could be particularly beneficial for women, such as cervical barriers and microbicides. Microbicides are topical compounds for women to use prior to sex to help prevent transmission of HIV and other STDs.<sup>8</sup>

**Geography:** The HIV/AIDS epidemic in some states is more likely to have a woman's face. A third of those estimated to be living with AIDS in Maryland, Connecticut, New Jersey, and the Virgin Islands are female (compared to 23% nationally). New York has the highest number of women living with AIDS (Figure 3).<sup>22</sup> Regionally, the concentration of new AIDS cases among women, as measured by the AIDS case rate per 100,000, is highest in the Northeast and the South. Six of the ten states with the highest case rates among women are in the South, with the District of Columbia topping the list at 100.0 per 100,000, or 12 times the national rate for women.<sup>22</sup>



**Income:** The HIV Cost and Services Utilization Study (HCSUS), the only nationally representative study of people with HIV/AIDS receiving regular or ongoing medical care, found that women with HIV were disproportionately low-income. Nearly two-thirds (64%) had annual incomes below \$10,000 compared to 41% of men.<sup>4</sup>

**Family responsibilities:** HCSUS also found that most women with HIV/AIDS receiving medical care had children under age 18 in their homes (76%), which may complicate their ability to manage their own illness.<sup>23</sup>

### Access to and Use of the Health Care System

Studies have indicated that women with HIV/AIDS may encounter barriers to treatment and do not receive optimal levels of care compared to men.

- HCSUS found that women with HIV were less likely to receive combination therapy and fared more poorly on other access measures than men.<sup>5</sup>
- Women with HIV were also more likely to postpone care because they lacked transportation (26%) or were too sick to go to the doctor (23%) than men (12% and 14%, respectively).<sup>6</sup>
- A recent analysis of data from 2000–2002 in 11 HIV primary and specialty care sites in the U.S. found higher rates of hospitalization and outpatient visits among women with HIV/AIDS compared to men.<sup>7</sup>

**Health Insurance:** Having health insurance, either public or private, improves access to care. Medicaid, the nation's health insurance program for low-income Americans and the largest source of public funding for AIDS care, is a critical source of coverage for people with HIV/AIDS. HCSUS found that women with HIV receiving care were:<sup>4,24</sup>

- more likely than their male counterparts to be covered by Medicaid (61% compared to 39%) because they qualified for Medicaid as pregnant women or as parents of a dependent child.
- less likely to be privately insured (14% of women compared to 36% of men).
- as likely to be uninsured (21% of women and 19% of men).

Insurance status also varies at the time of HIV diagnosis. Analysis of data from 25 states between 1994 and 2000 found that women were less likely than men to be privately insured and more likely to be covered by Medicaid at the time of their HIV diagnosis. Black and Latino women were more likely to be covered by Medicaid than white women, and Latinas were the most likely to be uninsured of any group.<sup>25</sup>

### HIV Testing:

- More than half (55%) of non-elderly women (aged 18–64) report that they have been tested for HIV at some point, with higher rates among Black women (70%) and Latinas (63%) compared to white women (50%).<sup>26</sup>
- Among those who are HIV positive, 36% of women were tested for HIV late in their illness—that is, diagnosed with AIDS within one year of testing positive (in those states/areas with HIV name reporting); by comparison, 41% of men were tested late.<sup>1</sup>
- The CDC recommends routine HIV screening for all adults, aged 13–64, in health care settings, including women, and repeat screening at least annually for those at high risk. The CDC also recommends that HIV screening be included in the routine panel of prenatal screening tests for all pregnant women, unless the patient declines to be tested, and repeat HIV screening in the third trimester for women at high-risk for HIV. HIV testing of newborns is recommended if the mother's HIV status is unknown.<sup>27</sup>

### Concern About HIV/AIDS

When asked how concerned they were personally about becoming infected with HIV, a recent survey found that 30% of non-elderly women said they were “very” or “somewhat” concerned. Black women were much more likely to say they were concerned (53%) as were Latinas (51%). More than six in ten female parents (61%) said they were personally “very” or “somewhat” concerned about their children becoming infected.<sup>26</sup>

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